



# GRUS AUSTRALASIANUS, *Gould.*

## Australian Crane.

*Grus Australasianus*, Gould in Proc. of Zool. Soc., November 1847.

*Native Companion*, of the Colonists.

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HAVING carefully compared the bird here represented with the *Grus Antigone* of India, with which it has hitherto been considered identical, I am satisfied that it is entirely distinct, and I have consequently assigned to it the specific term of *Australasianus*, which in this instance is more than ordinarily appropriate, since it is applied to the only species of the form inhabiting the country.

The *Grus Australasianus* is abundantly distributed over the greater portion of Australia from New South Wales on the south to Port Essington on the north; but although it is thus widely diffused, it has not yet been observed in the colony of Swan River, and it does not inhabit Van Diemen's Land. It was frequently observed by Dr. Leichardt during his overland expedition from Moreton Bay; Captain Sturt states that it was very abundant on the Macquarrie; and I found it very numerous in the neighbourhood of the Namoi and on the Brezi Plains in December 1839, as well as on the low flat islands at the mouth of the Hunter. In these localities it may be seen at almost every season of the year, sometimes singly or in pairs, and at others in flocks of from thirty to forty in number.

Like other members of the genus *Grus*, it is most stately and elegant in all its actions, and adds greatly to the interest of the scenery which is ornamented with its presence. It is not unfrequently captured, and is very easily tamed: when at Paramatta I saw a remarkably fine example walking about the streets in the midst of the inhabitants perfectly at its ease; and Mr. James McArthur informed me that a pair which he had kept in the immediate neighbourhood of his house at Camden, and which had become perfectly domesticated, so far attracted the notice of a pair of wild birds as to induce them to settle and feed near the house, make acquaintance with himself and the other members of his establishment, and becoming still tamer, to approach the yard, feed from his hand, and even to follow the domesticated birds into the kitchen, until unfortunately a servant imprudently seizing at one of the wild birds and tearing a handful of feathers from its back, the wildness of its disposition was roused, and darting forth followed by its companion it mounted in the air soaring higher and higher at every circle, at the same time uttering its hoarse call, which was responded to by the tame birds below; for several days did they return and perform the same evolutions without alighting, until the dormant impulses of the tame birds being aroused they also mounted high in the air, winged their way to some far-distant part of the country, and never returned to the home where they had been so long fostered.

It is a bird of powerful flight, and performs journeys of vast extent from one part of the country to another: when near the ground the action of the wings is very laboured; but when soaring in a series of circles at such a height in the air as to be almost imperceptible to human vision, it appears to be altogether as easy and graceful; it is while performing these gyrations that it frequently utters its hoarse croaking cry.

It breeds on the ground, usually depositing its two eggs in a slight depression on the bare plains; but occasionally the low swampy lands in the vicinity of the coast are resorted to for that purpose. The eggs are three inches and a half long by two inches and a quarter in breadth, and are of a cream-colour blotched all over, particularly at the larger end, with chestnut and purplish brown, the latter colour appearing as if beneath the surface of the shell.

Its food consists of insects, lizards, bulbous roots and various other vegetable substances, in search of which it tears up the earth with great facility with its powerful bill.

The sexes are alike in colouring, but may be distinguished by the smaller size of the female.

This fine bird, which stands about four feet high, may be thus described:—

The general plumage deep silvery grey; the feathers of the back dark brownish grey with silvery grey edges; lesser wing-coverts dark brown; primaries black; crown of the head and bill olive-green, the bill becoming lighter towards the tip; irides fine orange-yellow; raised fleshy papillæ surrounding the ears and the back of the head fine coral-red, passing into an orange tint above and below the eye, and becoming less brilliant on the sides of the face, which together with the gular pouch is covered with fine black hairs, so closely set on the latter as almost to conceal the red colouring of the skin; upper part of the pouch and the bare skin beneath the lower mandible olive-green; in old males the gular pouch is very pendulous, and forms a conspicuous appendage; legs and feet purplish black.

The figure is about one-fourth of the natural size.